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Talks on Civics. By HENRY HOLT. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1901. — xxvi, 495 pp.

This book discusses a great variety of political questions, on which the author's views are generally sound and are stated with clearness. It is in many respects a valuable work, but its usefulness is much lessened by defects in the presentation. The very title is bad; there is such a word as "civics," but there ought not to be, and the ordinary reader will have to examine the book in order to find what it is about. Then Mr. Holt has put his work in the form of dialogue, which adds much to its length and detracts much from the pleasure of reading it. Plato has shown that philosophy can be agreeably taught in this manner, but Plato is not a safe model for ordinary writers to follow. The author says that he abandoned his original idea of writing a book for the use of the young, and certainly this work contains meat for men and not for babes. Possibly the form of dialogue was adopted when Mr. Holt set out to write for youth, but it should have been changed with the change of plan. Four hundred and seventy pages are filled with questions put by an imaginary teacher to an imaginary pupil, though this pupil plainly needs no teacher. Macaulay's schoolboy has been regarded as extraordinary, but he was an ignoramus compared with Mr. Holt's pupil, who manifests portentous wisdom in every answer.

The book contains an amount of flippancy and exaggeration that is most distasteful in a work intended for serious readers. At page 9, for instance, the teacher says: "What does the state government do?" and the pupil answers: "Some people in the cities are beginning to say that its main function is really to enable the country to milk the cities, to give country legislators . . . the chance to get bought off." Comments of this character are lamentably frequent. Mr. Holt belongs to those who delight in denouncing the government of the country and believe that our legislators are all ignorant and corrupt. At page 471 the teacher, in speaking of questions of taxation, says: "How would you expect them to be handled by the unlettered men who compose the majority of our legislatures?" and the pupil answers: "Just as they have been handled in the United States, with less wisdom and more corruption than under any other government in Christendom." Mr. Holt does not really think that the government of the country has been worse than that of Spain or Haiti or the South American republics, but he loves to indulge in flip-pant exaggerations. Such things may be well enough in a newspaper

article, but they are sadly out of place in a book that seeks to inform intelligent men upon practical questions.

There are also tricks of style which are unfortunate. If a man wants to spell though, "tho," it is his privilege; but why the noun "ability," and even the adjective "able," should always be dignified with a capital it is hard to understand. It may be said that such blemishes are trivial, but they remain blemishes.

When we come to consider the scope of the book, a large part of it is taken up by a review of the character of government and of the laws in reference to real and personal property. Even quite technical questions are discussed, and the pupil talks, not always very accurately, about easements and party walls, "estates by judgment" (whatever they may be) and other matters equally abstruse. These discussions are not of great value. The legal principles are sometimes stated with inaccuracy; the résumé of the law is useless for a lawyer and not very useful for a layman.

By far the best part of Mr. Holt's book is his discussion of questions of finance, commerce and taxation. Much of this is so good that we regret it is not presented to the public in more attractive shape. The author has studied the best authorities, he holds correct views and he presents them clearly and forcibly. He discusses at length the tenets of Henry George and his school, showing their inherent weakness. He is sound on all financial questions. Bimetallists and fiat-money men could get much information from Mr. Holt, if they knew enough to profit by what he says.

Little fault can be found with what is said about taxation. Occasionally, indeed, Mr. Holt reaches results with which it is difficult to agree. He is wrong in his criticism of the inheritance tax, which is destined to be of increasing importance in the scheme of taxation. Among the objections to it this characteristic statement is made: "The widows and orphans pay more than their share of such a tax, because they are not as able liars as other inheritors"; and as another drawback he enumerates "the objection to all petty nuisances — the tax never yielded much and never will; not enough to justify bothering the community and paying the collectors." Such statements illustrate the carelessness with which Mr. Holt writes. The inheritance tax already yields large sums. Furthermore, not even the tax on real estate can be collected with more certainty and more ease. The estate of a dead man must pass through the courts, and there are few who are willing to strip themselves of their property when alive in order to avoid a tax which will be paid after they are

dead. Enlightened legislation tends to abandon taxation of personal property of the living, which is always unfair and difficult to collect, and to levy a liberal contribution upon the personal estate which a man leaves when he dies. There is no fairer tax. It is eminently just that the public should take its percentage of the gains which have been accumulated because a man added to his own ability the good fortune to live in a land which furnished the possibility of using this ability to the greatest advantage.

For the most part, however, what Mr. Holt says about methods of taxation might be profitably studied. If the chapters on finance and taxation were published by themselves, if the exaggerations were corrected, if the flippancy was omitted and if the work was turned into narrative form, it could be read with pleasure and profit.

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American Diplomatic Questions. By JOHN B. HENDERSON, JR.
New York, The Macmillan Company, 1901. — ix, 529 pp.

Mr. Henderson's volume embraces five topics, *viz.*, the Fur-Seals and the Bering Sea Award, the Inter-oceanic Canal, the United States and Samoa, the Monroe Doctrine and the Northeast Coast Fisheries. Some of these topics are discussed at much length, and it is a pleasure to recognize in the discussion of all of them a spirit of fairness and a desire to be guided solely by considerations of law and history. It is also gratifying to perceive in the volume an evidence of the growth in the United States of an interest in international questions and of a spirit of sobriety in dealing with them. Bearing always in mind these meritorious features of the author's work, it is with a view in some sense to aid his future efforts that we feel obliged to notice certain grave defects in the present volume.

The first thing that will attract the attention of even the average reader is the entire absence of citations of authority. This omission must of necessity render the volume to a great extent valueless to serious and careful students. It falls to few men to reach a point where their mere statement of a fact or a principle carries with it a final and conclusive assurance of accuracy; and in the present instance there seems to be a constant connection between the lack of citations and a certain want of precision. The latter defect may, indeed, be ascribed to other causes than a failure to consult authoritative sources; but where both defects constantly appear, it is not unnatural to infer that there is a connection between them.